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NOTES ON FOLK-LORE OF TEXAS.

BY W. PRESCOTT WEBB.

THE material presented in the following notes was gathered around Beeville, Tex. Beeville is in Bee County, a cattle country, now becoming agricultural, and is located ninety miles south of San Antonio, about midway between there and Corpus Christi. It is near the Nueces River, and within thirty miles of the historic old Goliad of Texas-Mexican fame.

The best field of folk-lore is found in the strong Irish element in the population around Beeville, who are always stored with local legends and superstitions, and who are highly gifted in spinning these into interesting tales for all who will come and listen. Next there is the negro, an animated body of superstition and song. Then there are the war stories and ballads, here as well as wherever the veterans may be found. Three other fields are to be found in the railroad-songs, cowboy-songs, and the mass of Mexican superstition and legend.

Any one of these fields offers inexhaustible resources to the gleaner of folk-lore. The material seems to increase with the effort to get it. This paper will not deal with the cowboy-songs, for others have covered that subject too ably, nor shall I attempt the Mexican lore. I shall give some local tales and legends, a railroad-song, and some negro songs.

LOCAL LEGENDS.

There is an interesting story regarding the peculiar properties possessed by the waters of the Nueces River. This river must be sacred to Ananias, for it is said that he who drinks of its waters loses all desire to tell the truth thereafter.

Tradition also accounts for the name "Marysville," which Beeville had before it was given its present name. Away back in the days of Spanish dominion, before there was an American settlement in south-western Texas, two beautiful *señoritas* lived with their father in a *cabana* ("cabin"), under a large *mott* ("grove") on the site of Beeville. Maria was the younger daughter, says tradition, and the most beautiful woman in all the Spanish settlements. She was the typical Spanish maiden, with the characteristic dark eyes, olive complexion, and a wealth of beautiful long dark hair, which made her the envy or admiration of all. Tradition tells how the Indians came once when the father and sister were away, and murdered her for her beautiful hair. The father had her buried beneath the largest tree, and near his favorite smoking-place. Here he and the grief-stricken

lover would come and watch in the twilight and darkness over her grave. The lover carved her name on the tree in large Spanish letters, which could be seen until recent years. Later the Missions in Texas were abandoned. When the Americans came and found the mysterious tree with the strange word, they made a settlement and called it Marysville. The tree still stands in a yard in the centre of Beeville.

There are stories of buried treasure left by the pirate and buccaneer Jean Lafitte. A certain Steve Pipkins was instructed by a "spirit" to go to a [certain] tree on the San Antonio River, and from it to step twenty-five feet south, one foot east, and one foot north, and then to dig down three feet. "Then," said the spirit, "you will find a square iron box left by Jean Lafitte." The man did not believe in spirits or buried treasure, and refused to go; but his wife urged and insisted until he had to [go] for the sake of [domestic] peace. When he arrived at the place, he found—no, not the box, but the hole from which it had just been removed, and around which the dirt was still fresh.

The wolves around Beeville are noted for cunning, and it is said that they can catch chickens out of the highest trees on any night when there is a bright moon. The wolf comes up directly under the tree in which the coveted chicken roosts. He makes a noise and wakes the chicken, and gets its attention. Then the wolf begins to chase his own tail, slowly at first, then faster and faster. The chicken, watching the whirling wolf, becomes dizzy, and falls out of the tree an easy prey.

On an expedition for collecting folk-lore, I made the most valuable find of my collection,—a negro song which I have with conceit named "The African Iliad." I came upon it in this manner:

One morning I heard a school-boy singing a snatch of a negro song. I said, "Harry, where did you learn that [song]?"—"From a negro here in town," he replied. "Do you know it all?" I [then] asked. "No," he laughed, "there is more to that song than I could learn in a week." That sounded interesting. "Who is that negro?"—"Floyd Canada," he answered. "Well, Harry," I said, "don't you think we could look Floyd up and get all that song?"—"I don't know, sir, he's in jail now for shooting craps."

That made the quest even more fascinating. But Floyd's jail sentence soon expired; and I located him, through Harry, over across the railroad-track, in a negro pool-hall. We found him with a band of his comrades, including the hotel waiter, making merry with guitar, banjo, harp, and song,—as merry as though a jail had never been.

When we told Floyd what we wanted, his black face was cleft with a broad grin from one big ear to the other. But in a small town one cannot spend much time in a pool-hall, and especially a negro pool-hall. The near-by depot offered the solution, for it is the common meeting-ground of all the races; and to the depot I invited Floyd. I had expected in him an old negro, but found instead a man of about twenty-seven. He was very modern, too. He had seen several States from the side-door of a freight-car, and still more from the rods, as his song will indicate, and had a detailed knowledge of the interior of more jail-houses than churches. Floyd knew the world, evidently.

In the corner of the depot Floyd dictated to me the "Iliad," and I wrote it down. The song tells no connected story, any more than the ruins of Rome tell a story, or the grave of an American Indian, with its bones, arrow-heads, beads, and pottery, tells a story; but a story may be drawn from it,—the story of the modern negro. It contains an account of practically every phase of his life; and if the race should be blotted out and its history lost and forgotten, much of it could be reconstructed from this ballad. We could learn what the negro held to be of highest importance, we could learn of his desires and aims, his love and hate, his ethical and chivalrous ideas, his philosophy of life, code of morals, and idea of the future. And it is for this reason that I have named it "The African Iliad."

It is remarkable, if for no other reason, because of its length, for it is among the longest ballads in existence. It contains eighty stanzas of four lines each, rhyming in couplets. While the song has little narrative unity, it has a certain unity of subject-matter. Pervading nearly every line is a spirit of restless wandering,—the *Wanderlust* and desire for a long freight on which to ride away from trouble. It, like all the popular ballads, sings itself. Floyd says it is sung to the tune of "The Dallas Blues." The subject-matter of the song falls into five more or less well-defined groups. I have attempted to arrange these in some order. The first division deals with his wanderings, and the call of the road; the second treats of his mother, whose advice he has ignored, and of home, which he imagines, as does every prodigal, he will never leave when he reaches it once more. In the third canto he sings of his sweetheart, the delights of love, and the pangs of jealousy. In the fourth he is evidently married, for he sings of domestic troubles and family quarrels; but, strange to say, not one note does he utter of domestic happiness. In the fifth and last he deals with trouble, is sentenced to death by the law for a crime, and concludes by making provisions for the final disposition of his body. Following are selections: —

THE RAILROAD BLUES.

I. THE WANDERLUST AND THE LONG FREIGHT-TRAIN.

Every time you hear me sing this song
You may know I've caught a train and gone.
I get a letter, and this is how it read:
Stamped on the inside, "Yo lover's sick in bed."

Give me my shoes and my Carhart overalls,
Let me step over yonder and blind the Cannon Ball;
That's the long train they call the Cannon Ball,
It makes a hundred miles and do no switchin' at all.

Train I ride doan burn no coal at all,
It doan burn nothin' but Texas Beaumont oil;
That's the long train they calls the Cannon Ball,
It makes a hundred miles and do no stoppin' at all.

If you ever had the blues, you know jus' how I feel,
Puts you on the wonder, and make you want to squeal;
When you take the blues and doan know what to do,
Jus' hunt you a train and ride the whole world through.

Big Four in Dallas done burned down,
Burned all night long, burned clean to the ground;
But give me my shoes, and press my overalls,
If you doan min' my goin', baby, I'll catch the Cannon Ball.

I'm worried now, but I won't be worried long,
This north-bound train will certainly take me home.
Number Nine is gone, Number Ten's switchin' in the yard,
But I'm goin' to see that girl if I have to ride the rods.

I got the railroad blues, but I haven't got the fare,
The company sho' ought to pay my way back there.
The train I ride is sixteen coaches long
Dat's de train done take yo' baby home.

I'm a goin' away, it won't be long;
When I hit Houston, I'll call it gone.
When I git to Houston I'll stop and dry;
When I hit San Tone, I'll keep on by.

How I hate to hear the Monkey Motion¹ blow,
It puts me on the wonder, and makes we want to go.
Dat passenger-train got ways jus' lak a man,
Steal away yo' girl, and doan care where she land.

I may be right an' I may be wrong,
But it takes a worried woman to sing a worry song;
When a woman's in trouble, she wring her hands and cry;
But when a man's in trouble, it's a long freight-train and ride.²

¹ Name of train.

² In this last stanza the negro has shown the keenest insight into human nature found anywhere. He shows the difference in the manner in which a man and a woman meet trouble.

II. HOME AND MOTHER.

I went to the depot wringin' my hands and cryin'
Everybody's bound to have trouble some time;
If I'd a listened to what my mother said,
I'd been at home lyin' in my foldin' bed.

When I git home, mother, I'm sure goin' to stick an' stay;
Mother, you may beat me, but you'll never drive me away;
When I leave agin, hang crepe all on yo' doah;
If I ain't daid, I ain't comin' back no mo'.

When I git home, mother, I'll tell you the truth;
I love you, an' I ought'n't left yo' roof;
You tol' me befo' I left yo' doah,
Many nights I'd sleep on the cold hard floah.

My mother's daid, my sister's gone away,
That's the reason why I'm wanderin' around to-day.
I followed my mother right to her buryin'-ground,
You ought to a heard me cryin' when they let her down.

I went to the graveyard, peeped in my mother's face,
Ain't it sad to see you, mother, in this lonesome place!
Doan never leave yo' mother old and gray,
You'll be bothered, man, troubled all the day.

III. LOVE.

If you mistreat me, you certainly won't agin;
You can tell jus' how your trouble begin;
When you're in love, you can't control yo' min',
Single man bound to git drunk any time.

I got one girl, an' I'm goin' to git me two;
You look so sweet, baby, no tellin' what you'll do.
If you don't love me, please don't dog me around;
Be true with me, and I'll not leave the town.

If I feel to-morrow like I feel to-day,
I'm gwine to ride the last train away;
If I had all you women's hearts in my hand,
I'd show you how to treat yo' nice black man.

I'm goin' away, it won't be long;
You're gwine to miss me when I'm daid and gone.
You are my lover, turn the light down low,
I got somethin' to tell you just befo' I go.

It's hard, man, but still it's true
To love some woman that never cares fo' you.
When you git one girl, you better git you two,
For there ain't no tellin' what the girls'll do.

There's lots of trouble here, and more on down the road,
You always will find trouble, no matter where you go;
Trouble is a thing that never worries my mind;
But if you're in love, it'll worry you some time.

I'm goin to town now, what you want me to bring you back?
I'm in love with you, baby, jus' anything you like;
Lemme tell you, girl, please doan wear no black;
'Cause when you think I'm daid, I'll come easin' back.

Red River's on the boom; Guadaloupe's standin' still;
Brown woman on the train; black one on the hill.
You brown-skin woman, let me be yo' Teddy Bear,
Put a chain on my neck, an' I'll follow you everywhere.

I'm a goin' to tell you what the Mexican tol' me,
"I no lika you, you no lika me;"
All I want in this wide worl'
Is a pocket full o' dollars an' a Creole girl.

I sent my girl to have her fortune told;
She come walkin' back with her mouth chock full o' gold.
Come, go with me, get your mouth filled with gold!
I wouldn't mistreat you to save nobody's soul.

IV. MARRIAGE AND DOMESTIC TROUBLES.

If I get drunk an' down, who's goin' to take me home?
For yonder stands my babe with a hobble on.
My babe sees me standin' in the bar-room door,
An' I swore to her I'd never git drunk no more.

Ain't it hard when yo' wife puts you out of doors,
Leave you standin' cryin', you ain't nowhere to go;
You get the blues so bad, you can't control yo' mind;
You love yo' wife, but she'll worry you some time.

You can always tell when she doan want you 'round,
Yo' meals ain't ready, and yo' bed's turned upside down;
Then you stay out late, git yo' name straight,
Befo' you come agin to yo' baby's gate.

My heart is forever breakin'¹
Children in the do' screamin',
It may be cloudy an' a rainin',
Keep me worried an' a singin'.

V. TRIAL, DEATH AT HANDS OF THE LAW, AND FINAL WILL.

I ain't a goin' to die, jus' goin' to sleep away,
To-morrow's goin' to be my trial day;

¹ This stanza seems to be the song of the woman.

Yonder comes my girl, a hundred in her hand,
Sayin', " Please spare my man, Judge, if you can."

I went to the court-house an' stood right on the stage,
Tol' the judge to give me justice, to let me have my way.
He read my papers, I was guilty of my crime;
Then I axed for 98, but he give me 99.

I went to the jail-house; first thing I spy,
Jail-house key, and you ought 'o hear me cry.
" Look here, woman, can't stand to see you go, —
Hang my case, Judge, an' I'll meet you further down the road."

When I die, ship me to my mother;
If my ma doan want me, ship me to my pa;
If my pa doan want me, bury me in the sea,
Where the whales and de sharks'll make a fuss over me.¹

In all this ballad the negro has sung nothing about the watermelon-patch; nothing about the forbidden chicken-roost, or the white man's advantage of him; and nothing of his having to work hard for a living. He loves, gambles, loafes, bribes the courts, and beats his way on the freight. He sings nothing of superstitious fears of ghosts and goblins; he does not clothe the forces of nature with fabrications of his own mind; he spins no Uncle Remus stories about Bre'er Fox, Rabbit, Coon, and 'Possum. All these are forgotten, and he turns his thoughts inward; he is extremely self-centred. He may be elated to the point of ecstasy, or depressed to the point of self-effacement; but he is in any case concerned only with himself, — his love, his trouble, his own interest at all times. He seems to have some regard for his mother, but this is only when he is in trouble. He mentions his father but one time, and that is with regard to his burial.

Nothing could be greater than the difference between this song of the modern negro, and the songs sung by the ante-bellum darky on the old plantation. The difference in the song indicates the corresponding difference in the singers. The old negro lived a simple life on the plantation, and in the dusk of the evening twanged his banjo and sang of hard times, the white man's greed, and of the wild animals. He, too, sang of his love, — about the only thing the old negro, and the modern one, like Floyd, have had in common.

The songs given below are purely ante-bellum. They were obtained from an old Confederate from Virginia. They are simple, and have a sweeter melody and a quietness wholly lacking in the modern songs. It will be well if you can catch the spirit of this

¹ The crime of which he is guilty was evidently that of shooting his rival, for he says in one place, —

Wish I had my pistol, my cold Forty-One,
I'd shoot that couple just to see 'em run.

enough to imagine these given in the crooning, rolling negro-melody, accompanied by a guitar or banjo. The first is very musical, and is named

DE OLE RACCOON.

As I walked out by de light ob de moon,
Says well I sang dat same ole tune,
An' dar by de light ob de silbery moon,
I spied an ole Raccoon,—
A settin' on a rail.

It was up to him I softly crept,
It was up to him I softly crept,
An' I caught him by de tail,
An' I pulled him off de rail,
An' I pulled him off de rail,—
Dat night.

He begin to scratch an' fight,
I hit him once wid all my might,
I bunged his eye an' I spiled his sight,
Ain't I de chile to fight,
Ain't I de chile to fight,
An' pick de banjo too!

The negro treats De Ole Raccoon as though he were an equal. A continuation of this simplicity, and close personal feeling for animals, is shown in the following "Old Virginia Breakdown." Reference is made here to practically everything influencing the life of the ante-bellum negro. The manner in which he accounts for the phenomenon of the thunder and lightning is truly ingenious. He sings of the coon, rabbit, and 'possum, the stingy master, his sweet-heart, good whiskey, and the Devil. There could be no greater contrast than that between this and the "Railroad Blues" as sung by Floyd.

OLD VIRGINIA BREAKDOWN.

Lightnin' is a yaller gal, she lives up in de clouds;
Thunder is a black man, he can holler loud.
When he kisses lightenin', she jumps up in a wonder,
He jumps up and grabs de clouds, and dat's what makes it thunder.

Soon one mornin' Jackie went a huntin',
Jackie jumped de ole har', ole har' jumped a 'possum,
'Possum jumped de ole raccoon, raccoon jumped de debbil,
Runned him round de hillside, an' treed him on de lebbel.

Ole marster is a stingy man, an' everybody knows it,
Keeps good whiskey in his house, but nebber says, "How goes it?"
Soon as ever day break, white folks got me gwine,
Soon as ever sun goes down, pretty gals on my mind.

Day am gone, night am come, white man take his rest,
 See dat nigger prowlin' roun' to rob some Shanghi's nest.
 Somebody's got my ole Shanghi, wish he'd let him be,
 For ever day he laid two eggs, an' Sunday he laid t'ree.

Raccoon's tail am ringed all round, 'possum's tail am bare,
 Rabbit got no tail at all, but de put a little motion dar.
 I went down to de ole hen house, I got upon my knees,
 Mos' killed myse'f a laffin to hear dat chicken sneeze.

The melancholy nature of the negro is well known to all who have studied his lore, but never have I known him to strike a sadder note than in the song called "Niggah Ginn," in which he laments the closing of the saloon where he bought his drink. I will give one stanza and the chorus.

I went to the bar-room 'bout nine o'clock,
 Knocked at the doah, an' the doah was locked.
 I stepped back an' begin to read the sign,
 Says, "No mo' gin', fo' the coon's gone blind."

Chorus.

Well, I doan think you ought to treat me dis away,
 You are takin' the good ole ginn away;
 That niggah ginn has been my only frin'
 It makes me grin, grin, grin;
 You can take the wine an' the whiskey, too,
 Please let the good ole ginn do!
 Well, I'm jus' gone—gone—gone.

In the last negro song I shall give you, there is a vein of pure droll humor undefiled, with a mischievous spirit that the negro does not often show. It is the story of Banjo Isam's wooing of Julie Glover in an ox-cart, and the unexpected end that came to this courtship and the sudden and unexpected parting of the couple.

JULIE GLOVER.

I drove my cart to de mill one day,
 An' I met Julie Glover goin' dat way;
 She 'spressed a wish dat she might ride,
 "Yes, dat you may, Julie, by my side."

Chorus.

Den go along dar, Julie Glover,
 Banjo Isam am yo' lover,
 Gwine to de mill wid Julie Glover.

Julie called me a banjo fool,
 She scratched my face, she pulled my wool,

She said I was a white folks' nigger,
Dat she and I could nebber figger.

Chorus.

I kissed at Julie on de road,
But de fool she screamed and squalled so loud,
De oxens runned an' de cart turned obber,
An' dar I lef' Miss Julie Glover.

CUERO, TEX.